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TITLE: Project Ninos

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VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: Winter YEAR: 1963

# STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE

A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.

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SECRET

*History of an interrogation program developed to exploit the USSR's mass repatriation of Spanish refugees.*



# PROJECT NIÑOS

Lawrence E. Rogers

At the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War, some 5400 Spanish citizens were stranded in the Soviet Union, 5000 of them children nine to fifteen years old placed in "safe refuge" there by their Republican parents, 150 the adult nurses and teachers who accompanied them, and the rest student pilots sent by the Republican government for training. For the next twenty years the children and the pilots were treated not as foreigners in the USSR but pretty much as guest citizens. They were relatively free to travel about the country, and they were afforded unusual opportunities for education and then for employment. About 15 percent attended institutes of higher learning, and another 20 percent were given technical or specialized training, half of these in scientific fields. On reaching adulthood they were offered full Soviet citizenship. Only about 35 percent accepted, but all were sovietized in education and in attitudes. Their only real ties to Spain were their families and the stories they had heard during their formative years.

Nevertheless, when in 1956 these Spanish "citizens" were given the opportunity to be repatriated, some 2400 took advantage of it. They arrived back in Spain in seven expeditions between August 1956 and May 1957, plus an eighth in May 1960. For the Spanish government the influx constituted a security hazard, for U.S. intelligence a multitudinous potential source of information on the Soviet Union. This common if somewhat divergent intelligence interest in the repatriates resulted in the establishment in March 1957 of [redacted] interrogation center in Madrid, staffed by representatives of [redacted] three U.S. government departments under a CIA administrative head. The unique interrogation program lasted four

years, covering some 1800 repatriates and producing more than 2000 positive intelligence reports.

*From Prototype to Production Line*

For the first half year the Center had only one CIA and [redacted] interrogators; in the fall of 1957 three U.S. Air Force and two U.S. Army interrogators were added. During the preliminary phase of the program, which lasted until August 1958, files were set up on all the repatriates showing their background of education and employment in the USSR (information obtained through interviews conducted by [redacted] officers in the provinces), workable arrangements were negotiated [redacted] for support and manpower, and the first interrogations were held. These were devoted to obtaining information of sufficient variety and detail to give Washington a basis for evaluating the potential of the sources and determining what amount of effort should accordingly be put into the program.

A major obstacle at first to Washington consumers' recognition of the significance of information the repatriates might have was the disappointing yield from exploitation of Spanish Blue Division returnees a year or so earlier. These survivors of the Blue Division, which Franco had sent to aid Hitler's armies on the Russian front, had spent eleven years in Soviet concentration camps, and because of their isolation and resistance to the Soviets during their imprisonment their contribution to intelligence on the USSR was small. The tendency among consumers was to view the new repatriates in the same light, a view that took some time to change.

The five interrogators added in the fall of 1957 were put to work on several of the most promising sources, repatriates whose background indicated knowledge of the Soviet missile and aircraft program. The reports produced from these interrogations gave Washington the first solid proof that the repatriates could provide information in priority fields of Soviet science and technology. At about the same time, scientific, economic, and geographic intelligence analysts were furnished lists summarizing the background of several hundred repatriates, and a study of these lists indicated that the sources had a potential value far greater than had been as-

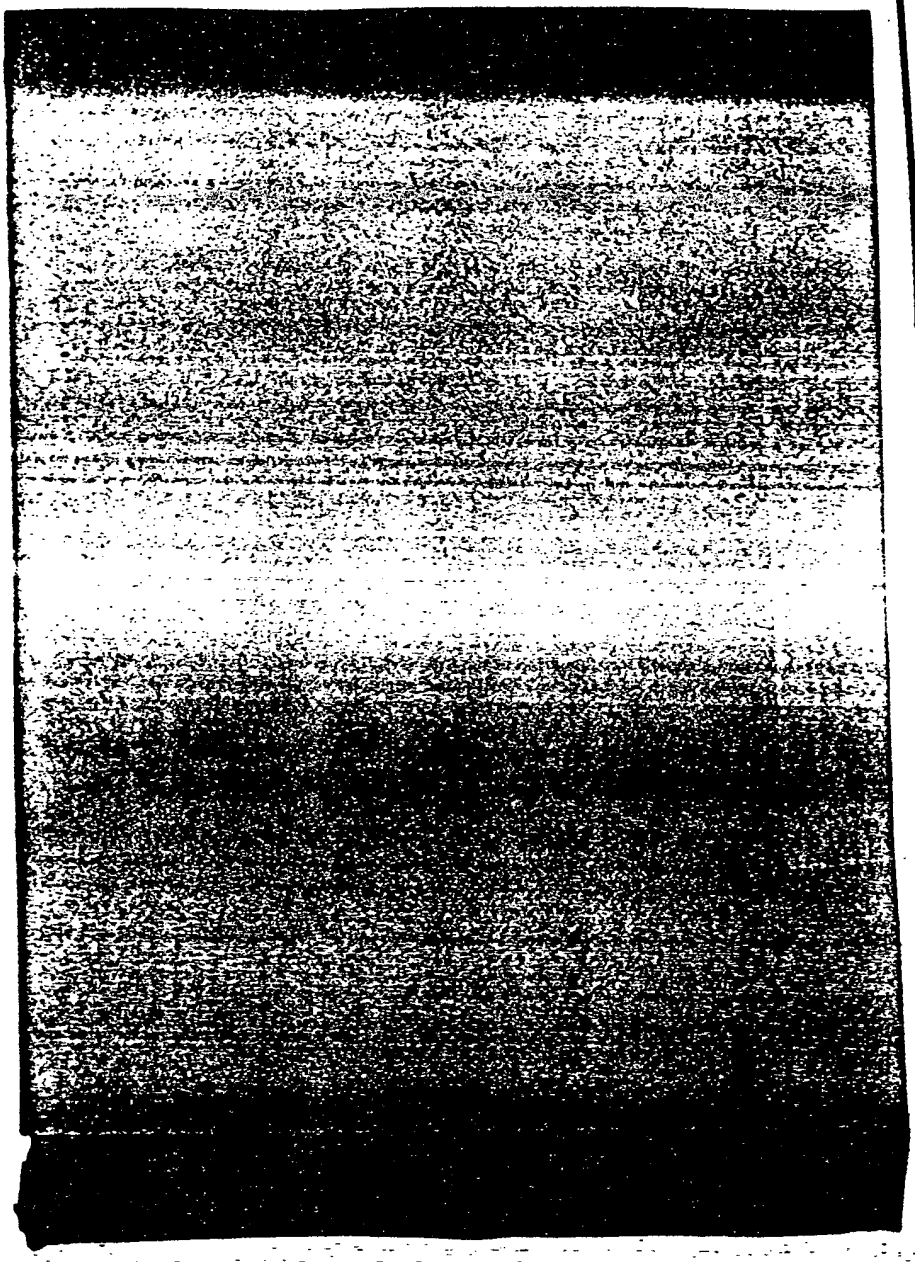
sumed. The guided missile analysts were the first to take advantage of this discovery: they made a selection of sources to be interrogated in the missile field and dispatched two missile specialists to Madrid to provide requirements and technical guidance for the interrogations.

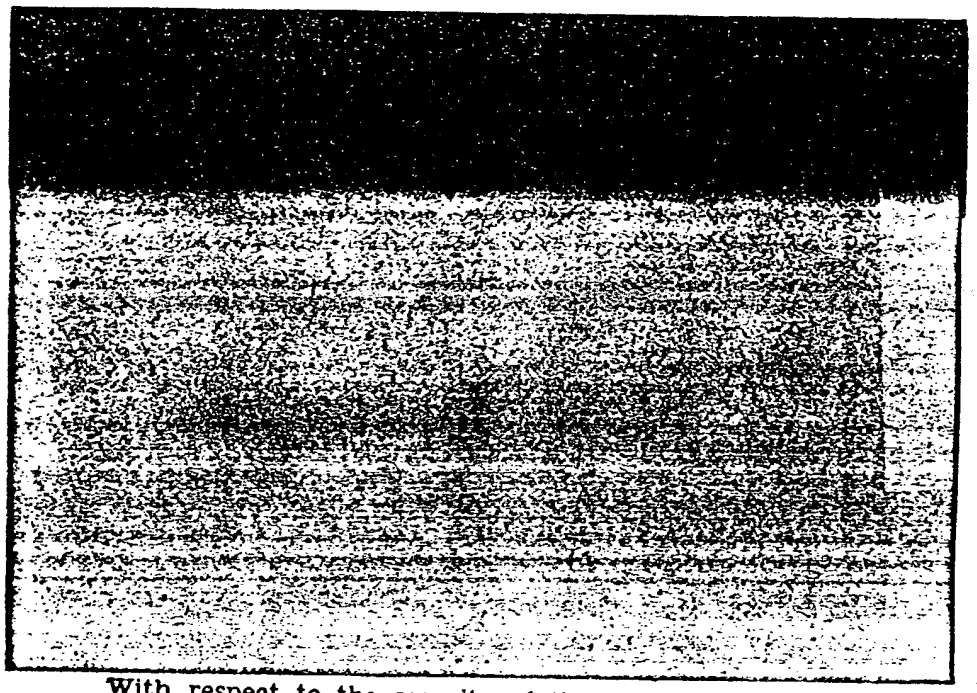
From August to December 1958, then, the Center concentrated its efforts on the guided missile sources and others recognized by the newly-arrived requirements specialists as of priority consumer interest. For this purpose the requirements specialists were integrated into the Center's staff not as advisors but as full working members active in all phases of the operation—the selection of sources, the preparation and conduct of the interrogations, the reporting of the resulting information. Initially they converted headquarters' general requirements into questionnaires tailored for the particular repatriates under interrogation. They also prepared a series of basic questionnaires on a number of subjects of special interest to consumers, shaping them to suit the background and experience of the repatriates and the interrogation methods used. They kept in touch with each interrogation throughout its course, and they gave back-up and technical assistance to the reports officers who put the intelligence yield into form for consumers.

The function of the requirements section thus developed at this time as one of the cornerstones of the operation became standard for the remainder of the program. It reduced the need for constant requirements support from headquarters, relieved the chief of the Center of many operational duties, and gave the Center a focal point for all positive intelligence, whether in the form of source potential, the substance of interrogation, or reported product.

In November 1958 it became obvious that if all the repatriates who seemed likely to have useful information were to be questioned in any reasonable length of time an expansion of the Center was necessary. During December additional personnel were selected and assigned, and by early February 1959 the Center had doubled in size. The number of interrogations held per month grew from 25 in November 1958 to 60 in mid-1959 and 90 in mid-1960, and the number of reports issued per month increased correspondingly from about 30

in November 1958 to nearly 70 in the spring of 1959 and more than 100 by early 1960.





With respect to the security of the Center itself, secrecy as to its location and purpose could be maintained only until it became established and operational. As repatriates were called in for interrogation it became known to them and others, including the Soviet government; several hundred repatriates, many of whom had been interrogated, returned to the Soviet Union. The security problem was then reduced to two basic elements: first, to keep the repatriates ignorant of the extent of American involvement in the program, and second, to maintain a reasonable degree of obscurity among residents in the local vicinity about the existence and true nature of the Center. Otherwise the interrogation program was a virtually overt operation [redacted]

It would have been unrealistic to try to conduct such a mass program on any high level of secrecy.

*The Call-In*

A major management problem was regulation of the flow of repatriates into the Center for interrogation. When those to be questioned in a particular week had been selected by

the requirements section, primarily on the basis of the priority of the information they seemed likely to have, they were sent a [redacted] summons giving them ten days advance notice of the date on which they were to appear. But the number failing to respond to the summons ranged from a fifth of some weekly groups to as high as half of others, and each name included in the call-in lists which turned out "negative," whether from failure to arrive or from refusal to cooperate, would mean the waste of an average of three days each of interrogator and requirement officer time.

Another primary objective of the flow management, in addition to minimizing fluctuations, was to maintain a balance in the composition of each call-in list in terms of staff specialties in requirements preparation and interrogation. It was not practical, for example, to call in at one time a large number of aircraft workers, because there were only two or three interrogators with good qualifications for handling aircraft technology. But account had to be taken also of places of residence and employment in Spain, of family and political relations, and of economic conditions. It was wise to avoid calling a hard professional Communist along with potentially good sources because his presence in the Center might seriously prejudice their cooperation. Sometimes it was important to call husband and wife together to promote their cooperation during interrogation, while in another case it would be a serious mistake because they had opposing views on cooperation with the Center.

Job demands, care of children, pregnancy, and illness actual or feigned were frequent reasons for not responding to the call-in. In many cases it was difficult or impossible for the police to find the persons cited in time because of changes of residence, absence on vacation or on trips, or residence in villages difficult of access. Quite a few, mostly hard-core Communists, bluntly refused to come to Madrid.

One measure tried in the effort to offset call-in failures was to call a greater number than could be interrogated, insofar as this number could be forecast from week to week. But this would result at times in having to double up interrogators' assignments or in keeping sources waiting. Double assignments were bad—only a few interrogators were capable

of handling two sources at the same time; and repatriates who had to wait their turn too long became indignant. Moreover, a protracted association while waiting with others who had been through the mill or were in process would on occasion lead to tactics of evasion, the invention of "intelligence," or a decision not to collaborate.

The most effective way that was found to moderate the uneven flow was to maintain, as long as it was possible, a reserve list of repatriates who lived in or near Madrid and could be called on shorter notice. When this reserve list ran out the fluctuation problem returned and was never completely solved.

*Processing and Reporting*

Prior to the appearance of a source at the Center the requirements officer assigned to the case would prepare an interrogation outline. Included in the outline were the basic facts about the source's life in the USSR, the intelligence targets on which he might be able to provide information, summary statements of specific consumer interests with respect to each target, the relative priority of the targets, which general questionnaires should be used, and any special questions. This interrogation outline was then translated into Spanish.

Reference materials on hand included the Industrial Register index of Soviet plants, technical journals, reference books, specialized guidance on the missile and aircraft industry, and volumes of other guidance material on a wide range of scientific and technical subjects. In general, there was too much rather than not enough reference material, and it constituted a storage problem. The only real deficiency was in maps of the USSR. Repatriates could provide excellent detailed information on specific localities, and detailed maps were needed to locate secret or restricted spots. The Center had great difficulty getting maps of adequate scale, but an even bigger problem was getting ones with notations in Russian or Spanish, particularly of the much-cited Moscow area.

On the assignment of the source to an interrogator, if the latter was from the U.S. team the interrogation outline and biographic file were turned over to him for study and dis-

cussion with the requirements officer, usually two to five days before the source was to appear. [redacted] the equivalent of requirements officer, who passed the information to his interrogator. During the interrogation, discussions were held between the requirements officer and the interrogator [redacted] usually at the mid-point and after the conclusion of each day's session. When the interrogator indicated that he had completed his interrogation, he and the requirements officer reviewed what had been accomplished, and if it was agreed that nothing of real significance could be gained by additional questioning, the source was released.

On completion of the case, the U.S. interrogator would rework his rough notes into a finished report. [redacted] gave their rough notes to an editorial staff which turned them into a typed report and returned it to the interrogator for review. In general, interrogators spent half their time conducting interrogations and the other half working on reports, a proportion that worked out about right. The interrogation of an average source lasted from two to five days, and generally an interrogator was assigned a new source each week. If an interrogation lasted only one or two days and produced nothing of value, the interrogator would be assigned a second source for that week.

When the interrogator, [redacted] had completed his report, it was sent to the U.S. reports section for editorial processing and preparation in final form. After logging it, the reports section sent it first to the requirements section, where the requirements officer who had handled the case would review it, make sure it included all significant points brought out in the interrogation, provide a preliminary evaluation of the worth and priority of the information, and indicate any numbered headquarters requirements to which it was responsive. It was then returned to the reports section, and a translation priority assigned. Since the bulk of the interrogators' reports were in Spanish, U.S. citizens living in Spain had been hired under contract to help in the translations.

The reports officer gave the report an evaluation based on advice in reports memoranda from headquarters, comparisons with past production on the same subject, and further discussion with requirements officers when necessary. When the rough translation was completed he put it into finished form, and it was typed on mats for distribution to consumers, except that reports of marginal value were generally forwarded to headquarters either in rough translation or in the original Spanish. The system functioned remarkably well; a constant flow of reports was maintained, and no large backlog accumulated.

*Results*

[redacted] the joint interrogation program meant primarily a thorough and systematic attack on the security problem posed by the sovietized repatriates. But what were the positive fruits garnered by U.S. intelligence? On its number-one priority target, guided missiles, Project Niños developed a bulk of information of major significance. It obtained data on the successive stages of Soviet rocket engine development which created a basis for estimating rates of progress in missile development and production. It gave valuable new information on the location of static testing facilities for rocket engines, guided missile testing and development centers, rocket engine production plants, and several surface-to-air missile sites. It furnished detail about rocket engine fuels and transport and identified many personalities in guided missile work. It gave the first identification of several guided missile development and production installations. It updated by eight years much of the previous intelligence on the Soviet missile program. The Project Niños information had an immediate significant effect on intelligence estimates and also established substantial leads for further expansion of our knowledge in this field.

With respect to strategic nuclear weapons, the number-two priority, the repatriates did not have much information of critical importance; but they did give supporting information about Soviet nuclear power systems, the first data on an atomic-associated plant, and leads to new information on uranium mining and nuclear storage sites.

On military aircraft, the number-three priority, Projec Niños turned out a large volume of information of consider able value in the preparation of estimates. It reported on con struction details and the production of Soviet fighter aircraft furnished detailed layouts of several aircraft development an production facilities, gave the types and quantities of aircraf produced at these facilities, and shed light on the aircraft in dustry's support to the Soviet missile program.

Outside the top priority fields, the repatriates supplied val uable reports about the Soviet civil defense and shelter pro gram, military medicine, higher technical education, an conventional military installations and weapons production They furnished geographic data such as town plans. The had considerable information on Soviet strategic industries— locations and layouts, the construction of new facilities, an the expansion of old ones. One group of returnees made an extremely valuable series of detailed reports on the So viet electric power industry, including facilities for power dis tribution and its pattern.

The basic and priority intelligence yield of Project Niños will be useful for many years. It constitutes a reservoir o information that probably could not have been achieved in any other way, even at many times the cost in money and manpower. The guided missile information alone, it is esti mated, more than paid for the entire project.